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CHAPTER XLV

SLAVES AND OUTCASTS

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IT is a work of the greatest possible merit to build a pagoda, and the founder, prefixing Payātaga to his signature, for the rest of his life is looked upon as certain to pass into ne'ban on the completion of this his present existence. Similarly a man acquires great kutho by repairing portions of one of the old national shrines, putting up a new umbrella on the summit, setting the steps that lead up to the platform in order, or even by simply gilding afresh a few square feet on a feast day. By doing any one of these things a man sets his balance of kan on the right side and gains the good opinion of his neighbours. It is, therefore, not unnatural that all foreigners should be struck with the fact that the regular servitors of the places of worship, those who sweep the platform, carry off dead leaves, broken branches, and litter generally, and keep the place in order, are not only slaves, but are regarded as outcasts with whom the rest of the community will have no dealings and whose society is contaminating. Not only is the original parakyun a slave for life, for no one, not even a king, can liberate him or provide a substitute in his place, but his descendants, till the cycle of Shin Gautama's religion shall have come to an end and all the relics shall vanish from the earth, all his children throughout the thousands of years that have to elapse, are fixed and settled slaves of the pagoda from their birth, and any one marrying a pagoda slave, even unwittingly, becomes himself, with all the children he may have had by a previous wife, irremediably a parakyun. The reason no doubt lies in the conviction of the existence of original sin. It is desirable

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to have the pagoda attended to. A very small acquaintance with human nature induces the belief that this will not be done if individual effort is trusted to do the work. Therefore prisoners of war and others whom it is not convenient to put to death are dedicated to the service. So strict is the dedication that any one who attempts or connives at setting free a pagoda slave is condemned to misery in the lowest hell, awizi. The servitor of the shrine can be employed in no other duty than keeping it in order, and kings and great men are threatened with loss of power and dire destruction if they venture to employ such outcasts as servants, even in the meanest capacity.

Slavery of the familiar form known in semi-civilised countries formerly existed in Upper Burma, but the pagoda slaves are a perfectly distinct body. A person who sells himself, or is sold, by his relation for debt is in a very inferior position doubtless and cannot enjoy any very great privileges. But he can always work his release, and is not thereafter considered as lying under any particular stigma. But the parakyun are neither more nor less than outcasts. They are looked upon as unclean, and the rest of the community will have no intercourse whatever with them. So much [177.56] is this the case that under British rule, which has of course freed them from their compulsory servitude, they are still looked upon with no less aversion than they were when the country was independent, and though nominally free to do as they please, have to travel into districts where they are unknown before they can find employment even of the most menial kind.

It is no explanation of the taint that the original servitors were prisoners taken in war, condemned convicts, or people expressly sentenced to this office on account of hideous crimes. The reverence for the pagoda cannot be exceeded, why then should the care of it and the surrounding buildings be considered to make its compulsory guardians vile and degraded people? In the old autocratic days it was a common thing for a pious sovereign to set apart certain villages, or a stated number of houses in those villages, for the service of the pagoda, and the victims were selected, quite regardless of personal character, by the village head-

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man from those who were unable to buy themselves off. The cloud, therefore, which hangs over such people is all the more singular. The feeling came out very strongly in the case of a man with slave blood in him, who was appointed by the local government to be a magistrate. Subordinates declined to act under him, and resisted all he did; the people were still more demonstrative, and petitions flowed in begging that the disgrace might be removed from their district. It was to English minds quite impossible that this should be done, and equally so that he should not receive support in the execution of his duties. The matter was far from being simplified by the natural feelings of resentment, showing itself in undue severity when occasion offered, which filled the victim of the popular clamour, and it was only by the exercise of great tact and patience that the English Deputy Commissioner was able to quiet the people, and after long persuasion gradually to set matters right. But the majority of parakyuns are far from being so fortunate. Here and there in Rangoon and Maulmein are a few men who have got into business, but it is only by carefully concealing their antecedents, and they live in constant terror that the few who know them will betray their secret and reduce them to ruin. The great bulk of the liberated, however—if they can be called liberated when they never had any direct master—find that the force of public opinion is too much for them and are driven to staying about the old source of their shame to obtain a living; they haunt the pagoda steps and sell offerings to the pious on their way to worship, candles and prayer-flags, incense-sticks, flowers, and fruit. Few of them now resort to their old source of food, the altars, where they used to dispute the ownership of the cold rice and victuals with the crows and the pariah dogs. In Upper Burma the sellers of gold-leaf and tagônlôn are often respectable, that is to say, free men, but in the low country so great is the fear of being mistaken for a parakyun that but very few but the destitute will sell their wares on the saung-dan. At the Shwe Dagôn, in Rangoon, the vendors are almost without exception of the unclean class.

Pagoda slaves are still universal at all the greater shrines. As might have been expected, many-pagoda'd Pagān is their

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● 567 greatest place. Here there is even a king of the parakyuns,
564 and he enjoys a sorry mockery of state in the use of gold-embroidered sandals, permission to wear jewellery, and the shade of a gold umbrella when he walks abroad. But a free man meeting him in his grandeur would make no obeisance and would pass him by with a grin and a gibe. The origin of his sovereignty is told in an old tale which proves the antiquity of the custom and the tenacity with which the dedication is held to. A king of Pagān—which has not been a capital since the fourteenth century—had suspicions of the loyalty of a tributary sovereign, and invited him to the great and noble city with its towers of gold and silver of which Ser Marco Polo writes. This monarch seems to have had no fears, and came with but a small retinue. Then the Lord of the Golden Palace decreed a great feast, and when all were assembled at the Shwezigôn pagoda, seized his unfortunate vassal by the hair, and holding aloft his sword, dedicated the helpless man with all his followers and their descendants for ever to the service of the great shrine, where lies a cast of the Lord Buddha's jawbone. Hence the petty state of the slave-king and the great crowding of pagoda slaves to his dominions to share his privileges. It is difficult to say whether the class will die out, and it seems certain that there will be no new dedications. It is perhaps more probable that the Pagān temple slaves are the descendants of the Talaing King Manuha, who was brought here a prisoner with all his people and the sacred books, by King Anawrata from Thatôn. As it is they marry and
564 increase. Besides the parakyun, equally among the outcasts were the executioners, jailers, and lictors in Mandalay; lepers and incurables of all kinds, coffin-makers, and those occupied with dead bodies and the graveyards; all deformed and mutilated persons and the lamaing, or government slaves, tillers of the royal lands. The tadaungsa are the nearest in character to the pagoda slaves, and were probably originally intended as a kind of reserve to draw from for a supply of servitors to the temples. They may not engage in any fixed occupation for their support, and are condemned to make their living by begging alone, but a few of them become very rich, for they wander all over the country and occa-

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is adjudged to have lost the case, and judgment is delivered forthwith. The winning party, for all the friends are always present, immediately cause their band to strike up, dancers perform and songs are sung, and every token of triumph is exhibited. Unfortunately, however, for any supposed efficacy of the system, substitutes are allowed, and in addition to this bribery plays as important a part almost as it did in the law-courts themselves. The man whose money went farthest won his case, whether decided according to the principles of the Dhammathat or the lottery of the ordeal.

The punishments inflicted were sometimes very cruel, and the treatment of the prisoners occasionally savage in the extreme. In criminal cases torture was frequently applied to extort confession from the accused or evidence from the witnesses. Rich men usually suffered nothing worse than a fine. For the impecunious, sentences varied from sundry stripes with a rattan, with or without imprisonment, to mutilation, perpetual slavery, and death. Except for debt, a man sentenced by the court to slavery became so with all his descendants for ever, and they were usually allotted to some pagoda, doomed to support life by begging as tadaungsa, or relegated to some other of the outcast classes. Death in Mandalay was almost invariably by decapitation, the agony of the condemned being occasionally prolonged by a fiendish executioner; the custom of throwing victims to be devoured by wild beasts, or trodden to death by wild elephants in the elephant-trap, was latterly wholly given up. In the provinces, however, other methods were very frequently adopted. North of the capital "crucifixion" was particularly common. The letwakat, or wakattaing, does not at all resemble the ordinary pictorial representation of the cross. It is more like a double ladder, consisting of three stout bamboos fixed upright in the ground, three bars lashed to them horizontally with canes, and over these again two cross-bars in the shape of a St. Andrew's cross. These punishment stakes were most frequently put up on the river-bank or on sandbanks in the stream, and were particularly common where the Shan and Kachin hills come down anywhere near the Irrawaddy. Sometimes the criminal was killed before he was lashed up, sometimes he was tied up

General Attitudes of the Burmese toward Work.

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Rank and status in the Burmese Village is determined to a large extent on the basis of occupation - with the factor of wealth where applicable taking precedence over occupation. The highest rank is accorded to the Buddhist monks who exert the ultimate influence. Government officials including the township officers, the THU GYI (headmen) and elders, and the schoolmaster occupy the second rank. The large land owners (of this group the rice-mill owners rate highest) rank next. Below these are the tradesmen - the paddy dealers, shop keepers and small holdings farmers who comprise the bulk of the population. Professional artisans such as carpenters, blacksmiths, gold and silver smiths occupy a lower position. However, it is common for the small holdings farmers to practice a secondary occupation such as pottery making.

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Fishermen and hunters are looked down on by the rest of the community because they offend Buddhist precepts by taking life. In this class also are those who raise animals (cows, poultry, pigs) for food, smugglers and brewers. Fishermen, particularly those such as U Myaing who operate IN fisheries often become wealthy, but the stigma of the source of this wealth is remembered by the community.

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A story is told of a rich fisherman who came to cover the Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Rangoon with gold plate. Unfortunately, he had sinned so much by taking the lives of fish that he could not see the pagoda. In a rage he returned to his IN to cover its posts with the gold. Because of the stigma attached to fishing those who make their living in this way tend to live together in their own communities. Thus Pathae, U Myaing's village is primarily a fisherman's community.

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In the days of the Burmese kings, wealthy men and nobles (THAKIN) would assign people under their command to serve as pagoda slaves. Their names were engraved in stone and their descendents for all eternity assigned to this position. The duties were light - consisting mainly of sweeping the platforms and carrying for the images, but the social position was next to the lowest. It is believed that the flower vendors on the platform of the Rangoon

pagodas and those throughout the country are descendants of the pagoda slaves.

Beggars are rated below the pagoda slaves - but, because of the Buddhist merit associated with giving do well for themselves. The beggars live in communities on the outskirts of the town often in cemeteries. They are thought to exhume the dead to get the coins placed in the mouth of the deceased to ensure expenses on his journey to heaven. The wood of the coffin is believed to be used in constructing their huts. Professional undertakers or morticians are regarded with horror since they like the beggars, make their living from the dead. The functions of burial are performed gratis by the entire village. A story is currently going round the University dormitories telling of an immensely wealthy Burmese coffin maker in Rangoon who has offered riches to the young man who will marry his beautiful daughter. When the future seems blank the students' friend advises "Hey, why don't you go and marry the coffin maker's daughter?" It seems that the money would scarcely compensate for the social discrimation. The extent to which the occupation classes are rigid in marriage and other social exchanges is an interesting problem.

A young man is obliged to remain within the occupation class of his family or to rise to greater heights. He is advised at an early age to "be simple, aim high, and tell the truth." When children play at daccits (thieves) of other "low class" games their parents object to their low aspirations and advise them to play nobles and ministers. One would feel justified in remaining idle rather than accept a position below that of his birth. It is better to accept a clerks job at a low salary than an artisans at a high salary. On the other hand those born into lower status occupation groups tend to be satisfied with their state as a condition of birth. In Rangoon, however, even the hawkers may have ambitions to achieve fame and fortune. The opportunities for social mobility is greater in the towns and cities but difinitely restricted in the villages.

Apprenticeship to trades begins at the age of 12 to 14 years, and usually lasts for several years. Ordinarily the youth is attached to the shop of a relative where he lives and is payed a subsistence wage while learning. The key to high positions lies in education in

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85. POTHUDAW.

been brought into a pseudo-connection with Buddhism by certain western neophytes of the Tibetan cult, are unheard of in Burma, which is the stronghold of primitive tradition.

Pôthudaw observe fewer *thîla* than *yathé*. They make their appeal with a gong of triangular shape (*kyîzi*, Nos, 22, 86), which spins on the string it hangs by, and emits a high and sustained throbbing note. *Pôthudaw* eat in the forenoon only. They accept alms in money and in kind, for which they carry baskets with a shoulder-yoke. They wear a white robe, shave the head, and pluck out the beard. *Pôthudaw* shift for themselves in *zaydân* about the temples and seldom remain long in one place.

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Mèthilá are female celibates who observe a rule parallel to that of the *Pôthudaw*. They shave the head. Their robe is like that of the other celibates with the addition of a jacket. The cloth is dyed a faint red. Both they and the *pôthudaw* are generally individuals who have lost their family ties. In some places *kyaungs* are provided for *mèthilá*, where they keep schools for girls. A few are possessed of learning. *Mèthilá* are about as numerous as *pôthudaw*, and both together are about one-tenth to one-twentieth as numerous as *yahán*, and several times more so than *yathé*. There is no class of female recluses answering to *yahán*.

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Payadyún form colonies in the vicinities of the principal shrines and of the cemeteries of large towns. They are the descendants of temple slaves, the condition to which captives in war were reduced both by the Burman and the Taláing races during their incessant

86. METHILA AT WORSHIP.

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88. MÈTHILA ON THE ROUND FOR SUN.

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struggles. Apart from this and the serfdom referred to at p. 32, slavery has only played a subordinate *rôle* in Burma within historic times. The *payadyún*, and they alone, are treated as outcasts by both of these populations. They beg for alms and also appropriate the offerings brought to the shrines in profusion at festivals. Their right to beg is admitted, although they frequently accumulate money and build fine houses.

Lepers (*anâ*) in many cases quit their families of their own accord and settle in the *payadyún* colony. In some places they were compelled to do so. The settlements have thus acquired the semblance of leper colonies. There are a few country villages of this character. Indigent lepers beg for alms. In 1891 there were 6,000 lepers in Burma, the highest ratio in the Indian Empire. There are now four leper asylums. Casual mendicancy is almost unknown in Burma.

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The Burman and Brahman soothsayers (p. 158) are regular frequenters of the shrines. The Burman astrologer (*bedín-sayâ*) casts horoscopes on the Brahman model (No. 279) and designates the days auspicious for undertakings. He takes his name from proficiency in reckoning, and is consulted about business calculations that cannot be done mentally.

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89. SOOTHSAYER.

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The Buddhist duty-days (*âbôt-ne, thadín*) follow the quarters of the moon. They are kept regularly during lent. On these days the pious laity of both sexes and sedate years observe the rule of *pôthudaw* and *mèthila* from sunrise to sunrise (*âbôt-saung*). They adopt sober attire, or else white cotton clothing, which is considered the plainest of any. In the forenoon men and women separately repair to the temple rest-houses, whither food for the morning meal, which has been collected the previous evening from religious donors

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